

Litton reminds SBC, ‘Jesus is watching us’

June 15, 2022

ANAHEIM, Calif. (BP)—Southern Baptist Convention President Ed Litton calls it a “gut punch”—Jesus’ reference to his disciples as an “unbelieving and perverse generation.”

Jesus had two questions for disciples in the Matthew 17 passage, which Litton posed in his June 14 address as if Jesus were speaking directly to Southern Baptists.

“Southern Baptists how long shall I stay with you? Southern Baptists, how long shall I put up with you?”

“How we respond to Jesus in these two days together, especially on the most painful, gut-punching reality of the Sexual Abuse Task Force report, how we respond is not just to the looking world that’s watching us, but how we respond because Jesus is watching us,” Litton said. “I think if we respond in a way that seeks to honor and glorify Him first and foremost, listen to me, we will wind up answering Jesus’ two questions.”

‘Lord Jesus, we need you’

Litton, senior pastor of Redemption Church in Saraland, Ala., followed his supposition with a plea.

“Lord Jesus, we need you. We need you to be the center of it all. We need you in this moment. Pass us not, oh blessed Savior,” Litton petitioned. “Lord come. Come to our meeting. Take over our hearts. Rule and reign in us, Lord God. And let us be careful how we treat one another; this is our

credibility to a lost world.”

Matthew 9:35-38 was Litton’s main text, exegeted to show Jesus’ compassion for those in need and his vision that not only allowed him to see the hurting, but allowed the hurting to know they were seen.

“We can’t say we are the greatest mission-sending agency in the world when we have a heart that lacks his compassion and a vision that lacks his vision for the world,” Litton said. “In all of our debating, let us have the mark of people who love one another even when we don’t see eye to eye on everything, for the glory of God and the advancement of the gospel.”

A ‘gut punch’ and a ‘gut check’

Litton emphasized Jesus’ call to pray for workers to reach the harvest of lost souls and encouraged Southern Baptists to put aside any pride that might hinder such prayers.

“Our greatest resource as Southern Baptists is not our brain power. It is not our resources. It’s not our ingenuity. It’s not our creativity,” Litton said. “It’s John 15:7: ‘If you remain in me and my words abide in you, you will ask whatever you want and it will be done.’”

“We need God. God does not need us,” Litton said. “The question is: Will we repent of the idolatry of power. Will we love the least of these? Will we allow others’ pain to get into our souls to feel compassion for them? Will we let our gut punch of suffering in this moment transform us?”

“This is a gut punch. It’s also a gut check.”

In calling his disciple perverse, Litton said, Jesus homed in on the disciples’ “bent to twist something that’s true and contort it to where it’s barely recognizable.”

Jesus' compassion toward the demon-possessed boy in Matthew 17 is an exhortation to believers.

"What do we hear from Jesus? He says you need to repent and you need to take action," Litton said. "You need to stop seeing people as the object of your success, and you need to love like Jesus loves."

Jesus showed compassion by continually going around teaching and healing. He saw those in need and felt their pain in his gut, Litton said.

Let compassion be the hallmark

Litton said he is not cynical of Southern Baptists.

"I love this convention. I believe the greatness of the Southern Baptist Convention is not in our heroes and not in the more famous ones," he said. "It's not in all the authors. Those are great people.

"But I'm telling you it is the faithful people who serve the Lord, much without recognition, that are going to ash-out the burned-out homes in their neighborhood, who are helping the flood victims, who are getting on planes and flying to Poland to help refugees," he said. "It's compassion. It stands to reason that we should have compassion as the hallmark of who we are."

Litton described 2022 as a gut punch for Southern Baptists.

"There's no doubt in my mind that when you read the (Sexual Abuse Task Force) report, you felt a gut punch. But we must do something," he said. "Jesus' gut punch was he saw something. He felt something. He did something. That's his pattern. It needs to be our pattern too.

"When you see something, don't look away. If you see something, God in his sovereignty let you see it.

“If Jesus is the center of it all, then we must see something and not let our eyes look away because it’s horrible, or because it’s bad news or incriminating.

“We must do what is right and just in the eyes of our God.”*